

Chairman Cotter and members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for this opportunity to share my public comment on HB 5958.

My name is Amanda Le'Anne Brunzell. I am a US Naval Veteran who enlisted in 2002 and served in Naval Aviation until 2005 due to medical reasons and I am a Catholic for Choice from Ada, Michigan. It's because of my service in the military and my Catholic faith that I feel I must speak out today against the Michigan Religious Freedom Restoration Act, or HB 5958. In the fall of 2002 I raised my right hand and spoke these words: "I, Amanda Le'Anne Geister do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic." I find it important to remind you that our founding fathers set up a government based on democratic principles, not religious principles. Among the many things that make this country unique are the liberties guaranteed in our Constitution, including religious freedom. Because we live in this pluralistic society, people of all faiths or no faith are welcome, and we as Americans enjoy more religious freedom than any other country in the world. I made an oath during a time of war, to protect and possibly die to make sure all Americans have equal rights. Even though I no longer wear my uniform in an official capacity, I still take that oath very personally and try to uphold those words.

If passed, this law would allow religion to be used to discriminate against those who do not share your beliefs. This means that bosses could deny their employees' coverage for health services, such as birth control. School guidance counselors would be able to refuse to help a gay student, and a pharmacist could refuse to fill a prescription for medication they object to. Discrimination like this is completely contrary to my Catholic beliefs about conscience and religious liberty and our American value of protecting the religious liberty of every individual, no matter what they believe.

As a Catholic, I am called by my faith to follow my conscience in all matters of moral decision-making and to respect the right of others to do the same. It's important to stress that Catholics recognize the human right of religious liberty for every person, and we are categorically opposed to discrimination.

Religious freedom is an expansive rather than a restrictive idea. It has two sides, freedom of religion and freedom from religion. It is not about telling people what they can and cannot believe or practice, but rather about respecting an individual's right to follow his or her own conscience in religious belief and practices, as well as in moral decision making.

As a Catholic, I believe our laws should support and safeguard a woman's conscience, no matter how much money she has in her pocket, who she works for, or where she lives. These are the values that I fought for during my military service. I expect my government representatives to protect my rights and not to allow someone else's beliefs to be imposed upon me.

The vast majority of Catholics in the United States share these values. Most Catholics use modern contraceptives. In fact, ninety-nine percent of sexually active Catholic women in the US have used a form of contraception the bishops oppose. Catholics exercise their religious freedom and follow their consciences in making the decision to use contraception.

Catholics support access to reproductive healthcare services for those who need them. Two-thirds of US Catholic voters reject the right of employers to deny birth control coverage to their employees and their dependents based on the employer's beliefs.

Real religious liberty belongs to everyone, each of us by our own beliefs, by our own conscience, free to decide for ourselves what is right, what is best and how we exercise our freedom. That's why I'm here today: to urge you to vote against HB 5958 and to protect the religious freedom and right of individuals to

make these decisions for themselves based on their own beliefs, without interference from those who would infringe upon their consciences.

**That is real religious liberty, for everyone. I urge you to vote no on HB5958.**

Thank you for your time Chairman Cotter and members of the Judiciary Committee, at this time if you have any questions I can take them now.

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